

Message

















From: EPA News [noreply@cision.com]
Sent: 10/18/2021 12:29:57 PM
To: Harris, Michael [harris.michael@epa.gov]
Subject: EPA Chicago - Daily Media Report - Monday, October 18, 2021

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Report Overview:

Total Clips (10)

Water - Surface (10)

Headline	Date	Outlet	Outlet State	
Water - Surface (10)				
 Benton Harbor, state officials order urgent response to lead crisis	10/17/2021	Herald-Palladium, The	MI	
 New pipes vowed in Benton Harbor; State promises to find cash needed to replace lead lines in 18 months	10/17/2021	Detroit News, The	MI	
 State aims to replace city's lead pipes in 18 months \$18.6 million is available now for service line removals. That may not be nearly enough.	10/17/2021	Jackson Citizen Patriot	MI	
 State aims to replace city's lead pipes in 18 months \$18.6 million is available now for service line removals. That may not be nearly enough.	10/17/2021	Bay City Times	MI	
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News Headline: Benton Harbor, state officials order urgent response to lead crisis | 

News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: Herald-Palladium, The

Outlet State: MI

News Text: BENTON HARBOR â€” The state is accelerating its efforts to ensure Benton Harbor residents have safe water to drink, Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist II announced during a news conference Thursday.

During a news conference in Benton Harbor, Gilchrist said Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed an executive directive Thursday formalizing the urgency of the state's response to the higher-than-acceptable levels of lead in some of the city's drinking water, which was first discovered three years ago.

"This directive ensures that state government is taking a truly all-hands-on-deck approach, that we're all rowing in the same direction and that we are laser focused on the same goals," Gilchrist said at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Berrien County Office in Benton Harbor. "Now, under this executive directive, state departments and agencies must work quickly to take all appropriate action to ensure that the residents of Benton Harbor continue to have immediate access to free bottled water."

He said providing residents with free bottled water is a short-term solution.

In the long-term, Gilchrist said the state will help replace all of the lead water service lines in the city in the next 18 months.

"Departments will take all appropriate action ... to support the city in replacing lead service lines quickly, providing technical assistance to manage resources, infrastructure projects, assisting the city with matters of contracting, procurement, and financing related to the accelerated water infrastructure upgrade work," he said.

City officials previously said that with the municipality's limited finances, it could take 20 years to replace all of the lead service lines.

Gilchrist said that while the goal of replacing the service lines in 18 months may sound aggressive, it is achievable.

"Gov. Whitmer and I have already worked across the aisle to secure funding for this important work to begin through the state budget that was signed in September," he said.

On Sept. 22, Whitmer signed the state's 2022 budget which included \$10 million to replace the lead service lines in Benton Harbor.

Help on the way

While the service lines are being replaced, Gilchrist said the state will ship 20 semi-trucks carrying 35,000 cases of bottled water weekly to the city starting Monday.

"Also starting on Monday, the state will begin providing direct shipments of bottled water to the Benton Harbor Area Schools," he said. "Starting this Friday, we will begin direct deliveries to apartments and housing complexes in Benton Harbor."

Gilchrist said that will help get water to seniors who may not be able to go to the water distribution sites.

"I am committed to ensuring that our most vulnerable are not forgotten in this process and this effort. That they are served as we push forward together," he said. "We will continue to announce additional water distribution locations in the days ahead."

Elizabeth Hertel, director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, said at the news conference that her department has asked the federal government for a waiver so money from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) can be used for ready-made baby formula.

Meanwhile, she said her department has started distributing ready-made baby formula at the water bottle distribution sites so families don't have to mix powdered formula with water.

"No matter where a person lives, no matter their identity or income, everyone ... deserves access to water that they can trust," she said.

A delayed response

For almost three years, the state's response to the higher-than-acceptable levels of lead in the city's drinking water has been to pass out free water filters and cartridges through the Berrien County Health Department.

After the news conference, Hertel told The Herald-Palladium the state recently started to take a second look at the lead in Benton Harbor's water.

"Given some of the recent test results and the composition of the water, there has been a question about whether they are as effective as we previously thought," she said. "And for that reason, until we feel like we can say that with certainty, we would rather have people use bottled water so we know we are completely mitigating any risk of exposure."

She said the state is testing to see if the filters are removing all of the lead, but added that she didn't know when the results would be available.

Until then, Hertel said Benton Harbor residents should use bottled water for drinking, brushing teeth, cooking and mixing with baby formula.

Hertel said her department is also ramping up efforts to remove all lead from homes. Once water service lines are replaced, she said the tap water could still be contaminated with lead if the plumbing inside the home or water faucets contain lead. She said residents can also be exposed to lead from paint and dust inside their home.

"We have our own lead abatement program that we've had in place for a number of years," she said. "We will have to continue to have to go into homes not just in Benton Harbor but across the state to make those assessments and do the abatement inside the homes."


Hertel said the state hasn't started the door-to-door campaign it announced earlier in the month.

"That was around the same time that we made the determination that we were not going to continue with the broad filter initiative," she said. "That we wanted to go with bottled water. And so our priority was ensuring we were getting the bottled water here on the ground."

City officials have long said the water coming from the city's water plant has no lead in it, and the city's water pipes are lead-free. It's the water service lines and plumbing inside the homes that may have lead in them. The city's efforts to add corrosion control chemicals to the water have failed to stop the lead from leeching into the water in some homes.

During the news conference, Benton Harbor Mayor Marcus Muhammad said work to replace the lead service lines will start in November using a \$5.5 million grant the city received from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in October 2020.

The houses slated to have their lead service lines at least partially replaced can be found on the city's website at www.bhcity.us/water.

News Headline: New pipes vowed in Benton Harbor; State promises to find cash needed to replace lead lines in 18 months | 

News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: Detroit News, The

Outlet State: MI

News Text: Benton Harbor - Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist vowed Thursday that the state will find millions of dollars needed to replace lead service lines in 18 months, calling it an "appropriate escalation" to address the city's ongoing lead-tainted water crisis.

The "all-hands-on-deck" effort is part of an executive directive by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's office that will continue delivery of bottled water, health care, home lead pipe replacement and other services for Benton Harbor residents, Gilchrist said during a Thursday press conference in the southwest Michigan community of 9,615 residents.

The Democratic Whitmer administration's announcement, which has followed extensive criticism by residents and environmental groups about delays in addressing the city's water crisis, is faster than a prior plan to budget \$20 million for a five-year removal process. Whitmer recently signed a budget bill with a \$10 million appropriation for Benton Harbor lead pipe replacement.

Gilchrist identified "a significant amount of federal resources that have yet to be appropriated" by the Legislature as the source for additional cash. The federal aid can be used for infrastructure projects such as removing lead pipes, he said. A governor's office release said additional money would be tapped from "federal, state and local resources."

"When a community faces tough times, we have to show up for and with them to fight for and with them with everything that we have," Gilchrist said. "Because we are all part of the same Michigan family."

Despite a lack of public warnings that the lead-tainted water was unsafe following three straight years of lead exceedances, the lieutenant governor maintained that the state has always taken Benton Harbor's lead issues seriously. His remarks came on the same day The Detroit News reported that state environmental officials had been slow to respond to dealing with the crisis by not warning residents that the drinking water was unsafe and that its corrosion control measures did not work.

"I think what's important to recognize is today's action represent, I think, an appropriate escalation of that response," said Gilchrist when asked about the state's delayed action. "We know that no amount of lead in the water is safe. So this action that we've taken today...we believe has escalated the state response to meet this challenge."

"What happened in the past" is in the past, and the administration is moving forward, he added.

Following years of criticism, residents and environmental groups are seeking federal intervention in the impoverished Michigan city. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Region 5 is reviewing the petition. It follows three consecutive years of lead-in-water results that have exceeded state and federal action levels.

Critics respond

One of the petitioners welcomed the Whitmer administration's promise to get the pipes out of the ground expeditiously. But the people long ago "should have been told the water was unsafe to drink" by Whitmer, the state Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy and Benton Harbor's mayor, said the Rev. Edward Pinkney, president of the Benton Harbor Community Water Council.

Pinkney did not attend Gilchrist's news conference because he was passing out bottled water at his church - something he has done since March 2019 given the lead exceedances.

Pinkney said he appreciates the governor "doing everything that we laid out" in the petition "to make us happy," but he insisted residents still need to hear definitively the water is unsafe to drink. The state health department has said it's passing out free bottled water and other services out of "an abundance of caution."

"Don't beat around the bush talk about we're doing this because of cautionary reasons," Pinkney said. "That doesn't work. Now you're still pretending that there's not a problem. Even today, nothing would have happened had we not filed that petition."

While state officials maintain they are seeing improvements in reducing some lead levels in Benton Harbor, only last week did they recommend that residents only use bottled water for drinking, cooking and brushing teeth.

Experts have determined there is no safe level of lead consumption, and adults exposed to lead in drinking water can develop problems in bones, teeth, blood, liver, kidney and the brain. In children, lead is more of a health risk and can affect their brains and growing bodies.

"Gov. Whitmer's executive directive reflects urgent community priorities of securing safe water and removing lead water pipes. NRDC is committed to working with Benton Harbor residents and state officials to move this plan forward," said Cyndi Roper, senior Michigan advocate with the Natural Resources Defense Council.

One Republican legislative leader indicated support for directing more aid toward replacing Benton Harbor's lead pipes while criticizing two years of Whitmer administration inaction.

"Lead line replacement is a long-term solution that absolutely must be achieved," said Abby Mitch, a spokeswoman for Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey, citing a Senate GOP plan for spending \$600 million in federal dollars on statewide lead line replacement compared with a \$200 million Whitmer plan.

A Senate hearing on the GOP plan is set for Wednesday.

To date, 219 lines in Benton Harbor have been replaced. There are an estimated 2,400 lead lines in the city.

Lack of warning resonates

The pastors who flanked Gilchrist at the rainy news conference at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' Berrien County office on Thursday had concerns about the lack of a state warning about the drinking water even as they welcomed Whitmer's actions.

While lauding the state for making bottled water and filters available to residents, the clergy members wondered in response to reporters' questions why they just found out a few weeks ago that the city had three straight years of lead exceedances.

That question has been brought up "more than once," said Bishop James Atterberry of Brotherhead Church, and "the truth of the matter is that they really don't know what happened."

Benton Harbor has had three consecutive years of lead levels in its water that have exceeded state and federal action levels of 15 parts per billion. The high readings have continued despite an effort by state agencies to have the city inject a corrosion control blend into the drinking water. The citywide reading in 2018 was 22 ppb compared with 24 ppb in this year's sampling.

"It kinda went from one day (water was clean) to a situation where we had to have bottled water," Atterberry said. "The information we are getting now is coming from those in charge, and they're saying that they didn't see that it was that bad."

The Rev. Maurice McAfee, the pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church, said he also wondered "why the information was so late in getting out to us."

While getting lead pipes out of the ground and cleaning up the water is paramount, McAfee said he wants to "backtrack and figure out how did we get to the point to make sure it never happens again."

"This is the first time in the last couple of weeks that we heard it was three years," he said, referring to the lead exceedances. "We're learning as we go."

Mayor Marcus Muhammad said the city has been working to solve the lead pipe problem "with the resources and the money that we had." Now "the all-out effort from the state" will allow the city to "really intensify in solving the problem," he said.

Muhammad said the city campaign for bottled water began in 2018 after 30 homes had exceeded the federal lead

limit. The state began distributing bottled water almost three years later on Sept. 30.

Pinkney attacked the mayor as being complicit in not sounding the alarm.

Muhammad knew about the lead situation in 2018, 2019 and 2020, Pinkney said, adding that "he was telling people that the water was good to drink, and he knew it wasn't."

Muhammad said at the press conference that, with the corrosion control, "that takes time to work." The city was under state emergency management control in 2017, a year before the first lead exceedance, he added.

"But we're not going to look backwards. We're going to look forward, because it's on my watch, it's on Gov. Whitmer's watch and we're going to solve it once and for all," Muhammad said.

Republicans weigh in

The state Department of Health and Human Services will continue to provide educational outreach, water sampling and filter distribution, Director Elizabeth Hertel said.

"No matter where a person lives, no matter their identity, their name; everyone, and I want to repeat that, everyone deserves access to water that they can trust to drink themselves and that they can trust to give to their families," Hertel said.

Since Sept. 30, the state Department of Health and Human Services has delivered more than 33,500 cases of bottled water to city residents. It also has distributed hundreds of water filters, but early efforts were criticized as not doing enough to educate residents on how to install the devices.

The national and state Republican parties signaled Thursday they are making the lead-tainted water crisis in Benton Harbor a campaign issue.


"While it is about time Gretchen Whitmer takes a closer look at the situation in Benton Harbor, where Michiganders have been without access to clean and safe drinking water, the timeliness of her addressing this issue raises far more questions," Michigan Republican Party spokesman Gustavo Portela said in a statement.

"Whitmer and her administration's inaction in addressing this issue is yet another failed promise to add to the growing list, and this one comes with catastrophic implications for the residents of Benton Harbor."

The first year of results that exceeded state and federal action limits occurred in the final year of the Republican administration of Gov. Rick Snyder, who has been criminally charged by Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel's office in the Flint water crisis.

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News Headline: State aims to replace city's lead pipes in 18 months \$18.6 million is available now for service line removals. That may not be nearly enough. | 

News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: Jackson Citizen Patriot

Outlet State: MI

News Text: BENTON HARBOR â€” All of Benton Harbor's lead service lines would be dug up and replaced by April 2023 under a goal announced Thursday by Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer amid an escalating response to toxic lead in the city's water supply.

Lt. Gov Garlin Gilchrist announced plans to replace the pipes within 18 months in Benton Harbor, standing alongside local church leaders, the mayor and the director of the Michigan health department at a rain-soaked news conference.

Lead pipe removals would be funded using \$18.6 million allocated thus far, according to the Michigan Department of

Environment, Great Lakes and Energy. Federal dollars are anticipated as part of a huge infrastructure bill moving through Congress.

The new goal marks an accelerated timetable for removals previously expected to take five years or more.

"While this is a very ambitious and aggressive goal, we believe that it is achievable," Gilchrist said.

The effort was cast as part of an "all-hands-on-deck, whole of government" approach to lead-tainted water in Benton Harbor, a majority Black city in southwest Michigan where consecutive testing rounds since 2018 have shown elevated lead levels.

Whitmer on Thursday directed state agencies to "expeditiously take all appropriate action" to, among other things, provide Benton Harbor residents with safe drinking water, free or low-cost lead-related services and health care, and communicate with city residents.

The state says it has asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture to let WIC program families in Benton Harbor get ready-made baby formula that does not need to be mixed with water, and is asking to have Medicaid services expanded to help with lead abatement in homes.

There is no safe level of exposure to lead, a neurotoxin that can damage the brain and organs.

TAP WATER ALERT

Bottled water delivery, which began in earnest on Oct. 6, when the state formally recommended city residents switch away from the tap, will continue "as long as it is needed," Gilchrist said. The state has sent more than 33,000 cases already and that amount is scheduled to arrive every week going forward.

Direct deliveries to apartments and housing complexes will be added to the bottled water distribution plan, Gilchrist said, which has thus far involved volunteers handing out cases at drive-though community centers. The state is also planning to hire community residents to distribute bottled water.

The state began to step-up its efforts in Benton Harbor in late September, going door-to-door to distribute filters after 20 environmental and public advocacy organizations filed a petition with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency asking for a federal intervention in the city, which was under a state-appointed emergency manager between 2010 and 2016.

Benton Harbor has somewhere between about 3,000 and 6,000 lead service lines, but nobody is really sure where they are due to poor record-keeping.

HIGH PRICE TAG

The state's 2022 budget includes \$10 million for replacement of lead lines in Benton Harbor. That, coupled with a previous \$5.6 million EPA grant and another \$3 million in state revolving funds have already been committed to lead pipe removals, according to EGLE. That may not be enough. The agency estimates lead pipe removals in Benton Harbor may cost \$30 million.

Gilchrist said additional funding may depend on the federal infrastructure bill and state lawmakers.

"We still have a significant amount of federal resources that have yet to be appropriated by the Michigan State Legislature, some of which can be used for infrastructure projects such as this," Gilchrist said.

Benton Harbor water began catching regulatory attention in 2018 when the city's 90th percentile lead testing began showing exceedances of the action level of 15 parts-per-billion. Since then, the levels have remained elevated in each consecutive testing round.

Individual homes have shown from extremely high lead levels this year, including tests at 889, 605, 469, 109 and 107-ppb, according to state data.

Independent experts have suggested the city begun showing exceedances due to large drops in the customers base relative to the distribution system size, changes in tap sampling procedure after Flint and increases in the number of homes being tested across the city.

Benton Harbor did not begin adding corrosion inhibitor “ used by drinking water plants to coat the inside of lead pipes and prevent lead from entering the water “ until March 2019 under pressure from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy.

The Berrien County Health Department began providing free tap faucet filters and replacement cartridges for Benton Harbor residents in 2019. The efficacy of those filters is under federal study.

Local advocates and environmental groups who have been critical of the state's response issues some praise for Whitmer's actions Thursday.

"This is what we've been waiting for “ an "all-hands-on-deck" approach to fix the lead contamination crisis in Benton Harbor," said Rev. Edward Pinkney, president of Benton Harbor Community Water Council, which has been distributing state-delivered bottled water over the past couple weeks and buying it for residents on its own dime for a few years. "The governor's executive directive is a welcome step to inform the community that the water is unsafe now, but help is on the way."

The Michigan GOP and Republican Governors Association both criticized Whitmer on Thursday, pointing to a Detroit News story detailing state efforts to address the problem by tweaking treatment at the city's water distribution plant and relying on faucet filters to reduce risk rather than telling people the water wasn't safe to drink.


"Whitmer and her administration's inaction in addressing this issue is yet another failed promise to add to the growing list and this one comes with catastrophic implications for the residents of Benton Harbor," said Michigan GOP spokesperson Gustavo Portela.

At Thursday's press conference, Benton Harbor Mayor Marcus Muhammad responded to a question about why the city had not been using corrosion control before 2019 by pointing to the city's previous status under state-appointed emergency management, calling that a "missing part" that "hasn't even come into the story."

"We're not going to look backward," Muhammad said. "We're going to look forward because it's on my watch, it's on Gov. Whitmer's watch, and we're going to solve it once and for all."

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is no safe level of lead exposure for children. Exposure to high amounts of the toxic metal includes brain and nervous system damage, slowed growth and development, learning and behavior problems and hearing and speech problems. Exposure has also been tied to lower IQ and decreased attention span and performance among schoolchildren.

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News Headline: State aims to replace city's lead pipes in 18 months \$18.6 million is available now for service line removals. That may not be nearly enough. | 

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Lt. Gov Garlin Gilchrist announced plans to replace the pipes within 18 months in Benton Harbor, standing alongside local church leaders, the mayor and the director of the Michigan health department at a rain-soaked news conference.

Lead pipe removals would be funded using \$18.6 million allocated thus far, according to the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy. Federal dollars are anticipated as part of a huge infrastructure bill moving through Congress.

The new goal marks an accelerated timetable for removals previously expected to take five years or more.

"While this is a very ambitious and aggressive goal, we believe that it is achievable," Gilchrist said.

The effort was cast as part of an "all-hands-on-deck, whole of government" approach to lead-tainted water in Benton Harbor, a majority Black city in southwest Michigan where consecutive testing rounds since 2018 have shown elevated lead levels.

Whitmer on Thursday directed state agencies to "expeditiously take all appropriate action" to, among other things, provide Benton Harbor residents with safe drinking water, free or low-cost lead-related services and health care, and communicate with city residents.

The state says it has asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture to let WIC program families in Benton Harbor get ready-made baby formula that does not need to be mixed with water, and is asking to have Medicaid services expanded to help with lead abatement in homes.

There is no safe level of exposure to lead, a neurotoxin that can damage the brain and organs.

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Direct deliveries to apartments and housing complexes will be added to the bottled water distribution plan, Gilchrist said, which has thus far involved volunteers handing out cases at drive-through community centers. The state is also planning to hire community residents to distribute bottled water.

The state began to step-up its efforts in Benton Harbor in late September, going door-to-door to distribute filters after 20 environmental and public advocacy organizations filed a petition with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency asking for a federal intervention in the city, which was under a state-appointed emergency manager between 2010 and 2016.

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According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is no safe level of lead exposure for children. Exposure to high amounts of the toxic metal includes brain and nervous system damage, slowed growth and development, learning and behavior problems and hearing and speech problems. Exposure has also been tied to lower IQ and decreased attention span and performance among schoolchildren.

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News Headline: State aims to replace city's lead pipes in 18 months \$18.6 million is available now for service line removals. That may not be nearly enough. | 

News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: Flint Journal, The

Outlet State: MI

News Text: BENTON HARBOR â€” All of Benton Harbor's lead service lines would be dug up and replaced by April 2023 under a goal announced Thursday by Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer amid an escalating response to toxic lead in the city's water supply.

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The effort was cast as part of an "all-hands-on-deck, whole of government" approach to lead-tainted water in Benton Harbor, a majority Black city in southwest Michigan where consecutive testing rounds since 2018 have shown elevated lead levels.

Whitmer on Thursday directed state agencies to "expeditiously take all appropriate action" to, among other things, provide Benton Harbor residents with safe drinking water, free or low-cost lead-related services and health care, and communicate with city residents.

The state says it has asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture to let WIC program families in Benton Harbor get ready-made baby formula that does not need to be mixed with water, and is asking to have Medicaid services expanded to help with lead abatement in homes.

There is no safe level of exposure to lead, a neurotoxin that can damage the brain and organs.

TAP WATER ALERT

Bottled water delivery, which began in earnest on Oct. 6, when the state formally recommended city residents switch away from the tap, will continue "as long as it is needed," Gilchrist said. The state has sent more than 33,000 cases already and that amount is scheduled to arrive every week going forward.

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News Headline: State aims to replace city's lead pipes in 18 months \$18.6 million is available now for service line removals. That may not be nearly enough. | 

News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: Muskegon Chronicle

Outlet State: MI

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News Headline: State aims to replace city's lead pipes in 18 months \$18.6 million is available now for service line removals. That may not be nearly enough. | 

News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: Grand Rapids Press

Outlet State: MI

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News Headline: State aims to replace city's lead pipes in 18 months \$18.6 million is available now for service line removals. That may not be nearly enough. | 

News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: Saginaw News, The

Outlet State: MI

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News Headline: State aims to replace city's lead pipes in 18 months \$18.6 million is available now for service line removals. That may not be nearly enough. | 

News Date: 10/17/2021

Outlet Full Name: Kalamazoo Gazette

Outlet State: MI

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At Thursday's press conference, Benton Harbor Mayor Marcus Muhammad responded to a question about why the city had not been using corrosion control before 2019 by pointing to the city's previous status under state-appointed emergency management, calling that a "missing part" that "hasn't even come into the story."

"We're not going to look backward," Muhammad said. "We're going to look forward because it's on my watch, it's on Gov. Whitmer's watch, and we're going to solve it once and for all."

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there is no safe level of lead exposure for children. Exposure to high amounts of the toxic metal includes brain and nervous system damage, slowed growth and development, learning and behavior problems and hearing and speech problems. Exposure has also been tied to lower IQ and decreased attention span and performance among schoolchildren.

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